

## On-Farm Flour Mill Grows Its Own Grain

Less than 10 years after selling their 200 dairy cows, Shawn and Sara Gingue have successfully transitioned from milking to milling. The space that was once their milk room office now houses a New American stone mill and a hopper that holds 300 lbs. of grain. The flour they grind with the mill ends up in their 750-sq. ft. on-farm store or at bakeries, restaurants, and stores within a 60-mile radius.

Making flour wasn't on the Vermont couple's radar when they sold their cows in 2015 and planned to raise heifers for other dairies. But after attending a 2018 Northern Grain Growers conference, Shawn was inspired to grow grain, and Sara enthusiastically supported the plan.

"We had 100 acres of good tillable land available in addition to land needed for growing forage for the heifers. We started with a crop of barley, and then in 2019, wheat for malting," Gingue says. Because they didn't own equipment, they hired harvesters and truckers to haul the grain to an elevator.

"In 2020, we saw the vision to invest in harvest and storage equipment to hold the

grain and work with other buyers," Gingue says, to give them more control and options.

Their customers included Andrew Heyn and his wife, Blair Marvin, who own a bakery and also milled wheat and make granite stone mills. The Gingues had them grind their wheat into flour, then packaged it to sell to others and at their farm store, where they also sell beef.

Buying local became very popular during the Covid lockdown, and the Gingues regularly made 2-hr. round trips to have wheat ground into between six and ten 50-lb. bags of flour.

"Having our own mill really started to make sense," Gingue says, so they ordered one from their bakery customers. The 40-in. New American granite stone mill was installed in May 2023 and is capable of milling 100 lbs. of flour an hour.

"The stone isn't running fast, so it keeps the grains cool, so it keeps the nutrition and oils in the flour," he says, adding they make two kinds of flour. Some customers prefer whole wheat. But most of the flour is sifted through a fine screen to remove the bran and middlings. It's more suitable for most

bakery products. Gingue noted that his wife takes detailed notes about moisture and grain density to provide consistent milling.

The Gingues have had good success with Warthog hard red winter wheat. This year, they're adding a rye variety. They doubled the acreage to 200 acres to grow grain and non-GMO soybeans (for crop rotation) and have an additional 150 acres available for future growth.

"Now we do our own deliveries up to about an hour away, and we have shipped some. We're in the process of getting a distributor in Vermont and New England (in the future)," Gingue says.

"We certainly work about as much as we did as dairy farmers, but it's a different schedule, and we deal with customers who enjoy creations they make with our flour," he concludes.

NEK Grains (refers to their area in Northeast Kingdom, Vermont) sells flour in 2 lb. bags for \$6 and 5 lb. bags for \$12.50. They also sell pancake mix and products from other local producers. Check out their website and social media pages for more information.

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**Ramsey's Market has expanded to other Iowa towns with the use of lockers and delivery services.**

"We were looking at small town grocery stores in our area closing left and right," says Ramsey. "We thought about what our town would look like without a grocery. We saw lockers where people could pick up deliveries being used in Europe, Japan, and other areas and by bigger grocery stores in the U.S."

Initially, they bought the local grocery. By setting up banks of delivery lockers in neighboring towns, they were able to expand their business and maintain food access. Customers order groceries online. Once orders are delivered to the lockers, customers enter a code to unlock the locker box and pick up their groceries.

In addition to the banks of lockers, the Ramseys make it easy for their customers with curbside pickup of both hardware and groceries in their hometown of Lenox. They also offer Fresh Out Of The Box locker and home delivery services to dozens of rural communities.

"We started out making home deliveries every day, but have since gone to once a week," says Ramsey. "People love it and wonder why they've been driving distances

to get food."

Ramsey notes that some people just want theirs left in a bin, while others look forward to the delivery. "Kids who have moved away will order for their parents who still live here," he says. "The parents always have a big smile when we deliver."

The Ramseys have expanded their home delivery service to a wide range of food desert communities in their part of the state.

"People call and ask about what we have gone through and would we want to set up in their community," says Ramsey.

"The world is changing, and we have to figure out a way to change with it if we're going to help keep our small towns vibrant with needed amenities," he adds. "If FARM SHOW readers have questions, I'll do what I can to help point them in the right direction."

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## Food Lockers Offer Rural Options

Food lockers are one way Theo Ramsey is helping ensure small towns in southwest Iowa don't become food deserts. When

the hardware store owner and his wife feared the local grocery in their town was going to close, they bought it.



**Some of the 100 used Cubs available for parts from Houtz.**

## Parts Business Keeps Cubs Running

Rob Houtz and his Cub Cadet Used Parts business is proof that one man's trash is another man's treasure. Houtz retired from his Cub Cadet dealership in 2016. The new buyer had no interest in the firm's used Cub Cadets. He also didn't want any of the 200

skids of used parts.

"I had a 4-acre lot at home, so I took the 100 old tractors and the parts there," says Houtz. "I set up a website and started selling them."

In the 8 years since, he's shipped parts

around the U.S. and Canada, as well as to Australia, New Zealand, Europe, and the United Kingdom. This past year, sales totaled more than \$40,000.

The business keeps Cub Cadets running. Houtz claims he has parts for every Cub Cadet built since 1961. He should know since he estimates having sold more than 3,500 of them since he returned to the family business in 1980. It was one of his grandfather started in 1934, selling all International Harvester equipment. In 1968, his father cut back to just Cub Cadets as Chicago suburbs closed in on the dealership.

In-depth knowledge of the tractors and a lifetime of dealing with parts can be seen on Houtz's website. The list of parts, from accessories to wiring harness, is as systematic as any to be found. Customers can order by the part number if they know it or go to the used parts catalog.

"I have parts in bins by the part number," he says. "People will call up and want a part, but they don't have the number."

Houtz can help them as well. The website directs them to CubCadet.com or PartsTree.com to look up their model and find the part number that way.

Houtz sells used tractors he has on hand, as well as hundreds of used parts. An H with recent paint, an overhaul, wheel weights, canopy, belt pulley, and an MW transmission was listed at \$2,500 with a two-bottom plow and a 6-ft. sickle mower.

If he doesn't have a part in a bin, Houtz can quickly find one in good shape on his used tractors. A driveshaft is available for \$50, a complete drivetrain is \$100, and an engagement ferrule is \$5.

Many of the original 100 older tractors he brought home have been stripped to their frames and then sent to the salvage yard. Houtz finds it amusing that he still has more than 100 tractors on his lot.

"Not a month goes by without someone calling me to say they have a yellow and white tractor to get rid of," he says. "I show up with my truck and winch the old tractor out of the trees or wherever it's been parked. Usually they don't want any money, but I'll give them \$20 anyway."

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